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Committee on Conferences
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Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Mu'taz **Hyassat** (Jordan)

III. Documentation and publication-related matters

A. Submission, availability and distribution of documentation

Introduction and overview

1. At its 459th meeting, on 8 September 2004, the Committee on Conferences considered paragraphs 34 and 35 of the Secretary-General's report on the pattern of conferences (A/59/159 and Add.1) concerning the submission, availability and distribution of documentation and focusing on consultations with universities, depository libraries and other institutions, which had not indicated a readiness to renounce hard-copy documentation.

Discussion

2. The question was raised whether such institutions merely preferred hard copy to electronic distribution of documents or did not have the technology to use the electronic form. A representative of the Secretariat explained that some libraries did not have the technical capacity, and while the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management did not consider it appropriate to pressure university and depository libraries, it was confident that, in time, users would discover the advantages of using documents in electronic form.

3. With regard to the availability of documentation, in the discussion of the reform of the Department the view was widely expressed that the six-week rule must not be abandoned as the standard for timely issuance of documents.

4. Information was provided and welcomed on the progress in the implementation of free access to the optical disk system (ODS).

Compliance with page limits

5. At its 459th meeting, on 8 September 2004, the Committee on Conferences considered paragraphs 36-46 of the Secretary-General's report on the pattern of conferences (A/59/159 and Add.1) containing a detailed analysis of the compliance with page limits for the past two years. Nearly 90 per cent of Secretariat documents had complied with the established 16-page limit thanks to a continued and collaborative enforcement effort at the level of heads of department. However, reports not fully within the Secretariat's purview still accounted for nearly 70 per cent of documents. Intergovernmental support for the 20-page guideline for documents originating outside the Secretariat would be very helpful in effecting a further reduction in workload. It would also be helpful if Member States exercised restraint in respect of the length of their communications.

Discussion

6. In response to questions about how compliance with page limits was enforced, a representative of the Secretariat described the multifaceted approach of advance consultation and follow-up action with author departments. Past problems with lengthy submissions from the same source were identified and ways were suggested to shorten manuscripts where appropriate. If a reduction could not be achieved, the submitting department was advised that the document would take longer to process. An interdepartmental task force, chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management had been established to review and ensure compliance with all rules pertaining to control and limitation of documentation. The use of an addendum as a means to evade page limits was discouraged, but its use was appropriate for the purpose, for example, of presenting late-breaking developments or additional statistical information.